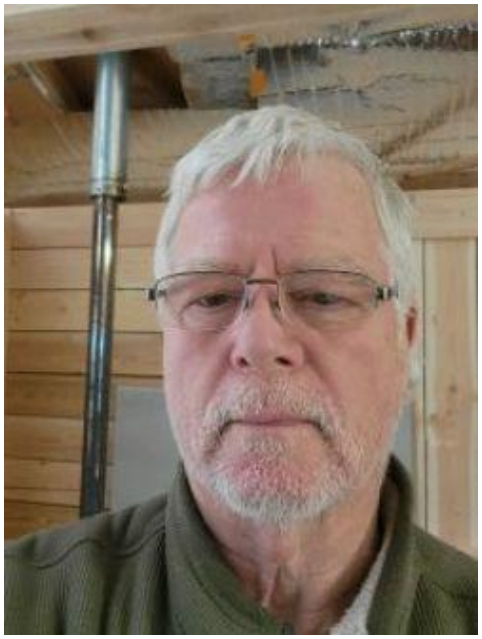
Meet Paul Orth



Creator of wooden signs for
Lewis County Farm Forestry
Association and
Washington Tree Farm Program

<u>How did you get involved with making Tree Farm signs?</u>

Back in early 1980s, I started working for Tom Fox (TMP) planting trees in winter months. We did some brush slashing, and pre-commercial thinning, and then I talked my way onto logging crew. A couple years into it, one day I was sitting in Tom's office while he was on phone. At the time, Tom was president of Lewis County Tree Farm Association, and he was asking who he was speaking with if they knew anyone who could make wooden signs to be given out as awards for different achievements in the tree farmer community.

When he hung up the phone, without giving it a lot of thought, I said " I can do that." (I had never made a wooden sign before in my life.) He said, "OK." Between he, Sherry (his wife), and I, we came up with the design for the Lewis County TFA award signs.

Originally, I would purchase the materials from a lumber store. Back then there were seven awards, with an average of five given out at the November banquet through the '80s, and early '90s.

Around this same time, Doug Stinson set up a sawmill at his place in Toledo. Different tree farmers would donate cedar for the signs, and Doug would mill the logs into boards for the signs and store them in a covered shed. Although Doug no longer has that mill, I'm still using wood that he milled. Now a couple of guys from Port Blakely with a mill add to that stack occasionally.

I made several Washington State Tree Farmer of the Year and a few National Tree Farmer of the Year signs in the '90s and early 2000s.

It was in the early 2000s when I was made aware of the distinction between the Washington Tree Farm Program (WTFP) and the Lewis County Farm Forestry Association. Sherry Fox gave me a few sketches of her ideas for the Tree Farm of Year sign and for the WTFP Tree Farmer of the Year sign. From those sketches we came up with the design we have today. Over the years I have made several custom signs separate from the organization, for individuals who are members who have personally requested them.

When did you become interested in woodworking?

I grew up in the country outside of Longview; there were just a few neighbors when we moved there, mostly hayfields and forest. As I grew up, more and more houses were built and now it is similar to residents in town. While houses were being built, I would often find myself bothering the carpenters, visiting and watching them even though I was only 5 or 6. My older brother and I would haul off scraps and build little cabins and tree forts.

I guess that's where i started learning woodworking. I did receive a set of wood carving knives and pocketknife as Christmas presents when I was 7 and was encouraged to whittle on wood and not my appendages, I still have a German-made knife I was given in 1962. From those days till now, I dabbled with woodcarving. I worked in a cabinet shop for a couple of years in mid-'70s and got into tree planting in 1979.

How long did you work for TMP and what are you doing now?

I retired from TMP in late '90s, got a contractor license and started building garages and shops and decks and a couple of houses.

In 2014 I started a two-year retraining course in welding at Centralia College. I was hired to repair equipment for a commercial flooring outfit. I still do part-time work for them.

About two years ago my wife and I purchased a couple of acres out of Shelton, where we now live. We spend our time working on our cabin, building things for the place. My wife makes some jewelry, and I do different art and craft projects when the urge overtakes me.